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ABSTRACT

The majority of the languages spoken in Papua New Guinea are highly diverse, belong to many unrelated groups, and are spoken by small language communities. This situation has resulted in widespread multilingualism and the emergence of "lingue franche," including the police-type, such as Hiri Motu. Hiri Motu, adopted as a symbol by the Papua Independence Movement, has acquired equal status in many respects with New Guinea Pidgin (NGP). The growth in the use of NGP has led to the emergence of a new, heavily anglicized sociolect, Urban Pidgin, which in turn has resulted in a weakening of the status of NGP both as an independent language and as a lingua franca. Although English occupies a prestige position in Papua New Guinea, recent attempts have been made to diminish this prestige. It seems likely that NGP will continue to surpass English in usage. In view of this trend, the government of Papua New Guinea has taken steps toward the standardization and lexical enrichment of the language, such as a proposal to establish a National Translation Service. Standardization efforts must concentrate not only on the lexicon of NGP but also on its grammatical structure. (AM)

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# TOWARDS LANGUAGE PLANNING IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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## THE LANGUAGE SITUATION

Papua New Guinea is the linguistically most complex area of comparable size in the world: of the over 1100 vernacular languages located in the New Guinea area, no less than 700 are spoken within its boundaries. None of these languages has a large number of speakers by world standards: the largest language, Enga in the Enga Province, has only just over 150,000 speakers, and very few languages indeed have between 50,000 and 100,000 speakers. The great majority of the languages are spoken by small to very small language communities — many of them numbering only a few hundred speakers or less. The languages are highly diverse and belong to a number of unrelated groups.

It is not surprising that this situation has led to the development of widespread bi- and multilingualism and to the emergence of lingue franche, most of them post-dating European contact, but at least five of them ante-dating that period and owing their development and use to trading contacts and trade cycles. At least three of these pre-European lingue franche — all of them now virtually extinct — come under the category of pidgin languages according to our present-day classification.

## MISSIONARY LINGUE FRANCHE

European contact resulted in the development of two types of lingua franca. One of these is constituted by the missionary lingue franche which resulted from the adoption of certain local languages by various missions for their activities. The expansion of the activities of given missions beyond the boundaries of the areas in which the languages adopted were tribally spoken and the continuation of the use of these languages by these missions in neighbouring areas in which different languages were spoken, artificially extended the currency of these languages at least for matters relating to missionary activities. A number of regional missionary lingue franche came into being as a result of this in Papua New Guinea, with some of them of very wide geographical and social currency, and others more restricted. In recent years, the currency of most of the missionary lingue franche has declined quite considerably, partly as a result of the adoption of English for primary education in 1953, and partly as a result of the spread of New Guinea Pidgin, both in terms of its geographical currency and the widening and the diversification of its social roles.

## POLICE MOTU OR HIRI MOTU

The other type of lingua franca which owes its emergence and development to European contact, is constituted by lingue franche developing in economic and administrative situations, i.e. as the result of the establishment of plantations and/or the establishment of European colonial administration. One of these languages is Police Motu, re-named Hiri Motu, which was until recently believed to be a direct continuation of one of the trade languages antedating European contact. However, recent research has shown this assumption to be in error and it appears that the language which seems to constitute a pidginised form of the Motu language of the Port Moresby area, owes its origin to the relexification with Motu or pidginized Motu, of a variety of Pidgin English. The nucleus of the police force of British New Guinea in the 1880's consisted of indigenes whose lingua franca was Pidgin English, but who had to carry out their duties among the Motu-speaking population who were already using a pidginized form of their language in their contacts with neighbouring Austronesian-speaking tribes, with this pidginized form apparently markedly different from the later Police Motu. This situation appears to have led to the relexification of the Pidgin English spoken by the police force, and the resulting pidgin language was, as a result of deliberate policy, spread through the administration and its police force into various parts of what is today roughly the southern half and the south-east of Papua New Guinea. The number of its speakers today is approximately 200,000.

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Since World War II, the language had been rapidly receding before New Guinea Pidgin and given up territory and social functions to it, but had in recent years been greatly strengthened in its importance through its adoption by the Papua Independence Movement (a political movement striving for independence of the area of the former Territory of Papua from Papua New Guinea) as a rallying point of its members and the symbol of self-identification. It has achieved additional importance beyond the members of this movement: many inhabitants of the area constituting the former Territory of Papua look upon Hiri Motu as a means for asserting their regional identity towards the rest of Papua New Guinea even if they do not support the demands for the separation of this area from Papua New Guinea. Characteristically, a large number of indigenes from outside the realm of the currency of Hiri Motu who come to Port Moresby to settle and who in earlier years never found it necessary to acquire a knowledge of Hiri Motu, have recently shown a marked inclination to familiarize themselves with the language. Failure on their part to do so would result in increasing ostracism towards them by the local population — a tendency formerly not observable.

The political weight of Hiri Motu is such that in spite of the comparatively small number of its speakers, the Papua New Guinea Government has found it politically prudent to give it equal status with New Guinea Pidgin in many respects. It is the third admissible language for debate in the Papua New Guinea Parliament in addition to New Guinea Pidgin and English, though in practice hardly ever used in this situation. At the same time, its knowledge, or that of New Guinea Pidgin, is a prerequisite for the granting of Papua New Guinea citizenship, and it is in official pronouncements referred to as one of the 'two major languages of Papua New Guinea.'

**NEW GUINEA PIDGIN**

The other lingua franca of the kind to which Hiri Motu belongs, is New Guinea Pdigin. It is now known that this variety of Pidgin English owes its origin and development to plantation activities in Samoa in the early 1880's to which indigenies from northern New Britain in Papua New Guinea were taken as workers and later returned to their homeland as overseers of plantations established there. The language was adopted, or more correctly tolerated, as an unofficial lingua franca for administrative purposes in the then German New Guinea and spread rapidly as an inter-tribal lingua franca through it, with its spread accelerating and becoming more general after the Australian takeover during World War I. In its most general socio-lectal form, it served almost exclusively as an indigene-to-indigene lingua franca and developed into an expanded pidgin, complementing the vernacular languages in many aspects of social interaction, even within individual vernacular speech communities. Another sociolect was generally used for European-to-indigene communication, and very few Europeans indeed used to acquire a mastery of the indigenous sociolect of New Guinea Pidgin.

In recent years, political developments in Papua New Guinea leading to the independence of the country have resulted in far-reaching social changes and brought about a situation in which the role of New Guinea Pidgin was extended into areas of expression and communication in which it had not been used previously. It has now become almost the only language used in debates in the Parliament, been increasingly resorted to in broadcasting and in the press and has begun to play an increasing role in education. At the same time, it has become the vehicle of expression of a new sub-culture which replaces the traditional culture, with its domain lying between the traditional culture for which the linguistic vehicle is the vernacular and the western culture whose means of expression is English. Increasingly, New Guinea Pidgin is replacing the local vernaculars in several geographical areas, and even more generally in a number of social functions.

These developments have led to the emergence of a new sociolect commonly referred to as Urban Pidgin which is heavily anglicized, with this anglicization not due to direct influence by Europeans, but to the conscious adoption of anglicization on the part of the speakers for reasons of social prestige. The direct result of this has been twofold: (1) a vastly increasing fluidity and loss of stabilization of New Guinea Pidgin and a threat to its continued existence as an independent language; (2) a breakdown in the communicative functions of New Guinea Pidgin as a general lingua franca because the anglicized urban sociolect is no longer fully intelligible to speakers of the most common sociolect used outside the urban centres which is generally referred to as Rural Pidgin.

In connection with the first of these two points, it must be pointed out that the assumption that heavy borrowing from English will make New Guinea Pidgin more like English may well be an oversimplification. One of the tacit assumptions in many studies of post-pidgin or post-creole continua has been that the eventual outcome of contact between an English-derived pidgin or creole and standard English is English. However, it does not seem at all obvious that the mixing of the two linguistic systems represented by New Guinea Pidgin and English should lead to the replacement of the first system by the second. Observations of the situation in Papua New Guinea seem to suggest that the result of renewed contact between New Guinea Pidgin and its original lexifier language is a new third system. In spite of heavy borrowing, Urban Pidgin does not appear to be more readily intelligible to a speaker of English than Rural Pidgin and at the same time it is no longer easy to understand for speakers of Rural Pidgin. This may explain why attempts by various bodies concerned with language planning efforts in the past, to bring New Guinea Pidgin closer to English by introducing English vocabulary and structure into it has in fact not had the desired effect.

Concerning the second point made above, effective communication across the sociolectal boundary between Urban Pidgin and Rural Pidgin is still maintained through the process of sub-code switching. In other words, most speakers of the Urban Pidgin sociolect are still more or less familiar with the Rural Pidgin sociolect and in addressing monolectal speakers of that sociolect, use the two lects in parallel: first making the statement in the urban sociolect and then repeating it immediately afterwards in the rural sociolect. This process tends to blur the increasing unintelligibility gap between the two sociolects for the time being. However, the young generation growing up in the urban centers, largely out of touch with the rural life, is very predominantly monolectal in the urban sociolect and their entering the adult sphere is likely to lead to a very sudden worsening of the unintelligibility problem between the urban and rural sociolects of New Guinea Pidgin.

One important consequence of the elevation of New Guinea Pidgin into a variety of new social roles has been that it is now regarded to be on a par with English in a wide range of contexts. As a result of this, the choice of one or the other code is no longer strictly regulated and a mixing of the two systems in a public context by bilingual individuals is encouraged. This is particularly observable in public speaking where the use of more than one code is regarded as enhancing the speaker's prestige.

Apart from its use as a debate language in the Papua New Guinea Parliament, in the media and its renewed admissibility to elementary education, New Guinea Pidgin is the *de facto* lingua franca of administration, except on the highest levels where its use is restricted to non-official situations. It is at the same time the preferred language of intercommunication between members of the English-speaking elite in situations other than formal official situations. It is also increasingly resorted to as a side-line langauge in secondary and tertiary education, especially the latter — it is very frequently heard on the grounds of the University of Papua New Guinea from which it used to be officially barred, and in teaching and lecturing situations, lecturers tend to intersperse their English presentations with New Guinea Pidgin if they feel that this may enhance their chances of communicating effectively to the students. This is particularly so in classes concerned with Papua New Guinea matters such as anthropology, language study, sociology, and similar disciplines.

The only areas which New Guinea Pidgin has not yet penetrated to any considerable extent, is law, relations with the outside world official activities in top-level administration and official manifestations of the top level of social life. These are still reserved to English.

**ENGLISH**

English occupies a special position in Papua New Guinea. It is the language of the highly educated élite, and as has been pointed out, the language of communications between Papua New Guinea and the world outside. Otherwise, its use is limited to the functions listed above. However, as has already been mentioned, on private and personal levels most of the members of the élite group resort to other languages for intercommunication — mostly New Guinea Pidgin. Nevertheless, the prestige of English continues to be very high in the eyes of the Papua New Guineans and it is looked upon by many of them, especially parents of children of elementary school age, as the sole key to economic wealth, progress and power, and they are therefore very eager for their children to become proficient in English. As a result of the frequent disappointment to such hopes, this attitude towards English is now beginning to diminish. It is important to keep in mind that for many school leavers in Papua New Guinea today, a knowledge of English is almost totally irrelevant. At the same time, in the present educational situation in Papua New Guinea, children who would receive their elementary education in New Guinea Pidgin or another lingua franca, would face serious problems if they wanted to proceed to higher education which is still basically in English. Strong arguments in favor of the scaling down of the use of English on all levels of education in favor of an increased utilization of New Guinea Pidgin have been made in the last two years in Papua New Guinea which brought a very strong mixed reaction from the public, with many voices violently against, but quite a few voices put forward by indigenes in favor in varying degrees.

**THE PRESENT, AND FUTURE OUTLOOKS**

It seems likely that in the foreseeable future, the social functions and roles of New Guinea Pidgin will increase and widen further and that it will continue to make inroads into realms at present reserved exclusively or almost exclusively for English. However, to fulfill such functions adequately, New Guinea Pidgin is in a very urgent need of standardization and especially lexical enrichment. Very few positive steps have until now been undertaken with such a standardization in mind — the only area in which serious attempts have been made is that of orthography. A standard orthography exists, but has still not been officially sanctioned by the Government, though its use is increasing.

Attempts at the lexical enrichment of New Guinea Pidgin in response to the pressing need of the availability of terms in it denoting concepts which are now to be referred to in it, have almost exclusively consisted of a haphazard and *ad hoc* wholesale introduction of English loan words by individual speakers of New Guinea Pidgin on a random basis.

The realization, mentioned above, that the urban sociolect of New Guinea Pidgin which is the one mainly used by speakers utilizing New Guinea Pidgin in its new social roles, is rapidly becoming unintelligible to speakers of the more general rural sociolect, has made the Government consider quite recently the taking of steps towards the standardization and systematic enrichment of the language.

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The very first aim of these intentions is the availability of a standardized New Guinea Pidgin vocabulary for the purposes of parliamentary debate and official Government pronouncements, as well as a more efficient translation service. A proposal for the establishment of an organization, tentatively named the Government National Translation Service, was submitted to the Papua New Guinea Cabinet in late 1977, and though the proposal has not yet been considered formally, there are indications that its unofficial initial reaction to the proposal is favorable. The main idea underlying the proposal is that the Translation Service in the widest sense and in involving New Guinea Pidgin in particular, requires the coordination of all personnel involved in translation in Government departments, in the National Broadcasting Commission and in the National Parliament, within the framework of one administrative unit in which proper training could be offered to them, the work being coordinated and properly supervised. At the same time, access to specialist knowledge and training in linguistics and language planning would be ensured through the establishment of an advisory body of professional linguists and other experts in the use of the languages involved to serve as a problem-solving and planning unit to which the National Translation Service could turn for assistance. This advisory body would at least initially be filled by volunteers from institutions working in Papua New Guinea and interested and knowledgeable in its language problems and language development such as the Language Department of the University of Papua New Guinea, the Linguistics Department of the Research School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (New Guinea Branch), Wantok Publications (a Catholic Missionary publication body which issues a Pidgin newspaper), missions, etc.

This constitutes the first concrete step towards positive language planning involving especially New Guinea Pidgin (apart from the orthography standardization briefly referred to above) and hopefully will constitute the nucleus for more extended language planning activities largely concerned with the problems of the code of New Guinea Pidgin which are assuming a magnitude of such seriousness that, as has been pointed out above, the usefulness of New Guinea Pidgin as a general lingua franca is in serious jeopardy. Also, if New Guinea Pidgin is to be used in education to an increasing extent, which is likely to be the case in spite of present strong insistence of the use of English on all levels of education, its standardization and lexical enrichment are absolutely imperative.

It is necessary that the standardization and enrichment procedures involving the lexicon of New Guinea Pidgin take advantage of the highly developed internal rules of word formation in the language which would ensure that the enriched language would be readily understood by all speakers of Pidgin. In fact many such items are already in use by New Guinea Pidgin speakers, but they are being overshadowed by the numerous English loan words used by others in their place. The collection and sifting of genuine Pidgin creations for new concepts is an important task in this connection. English loan words would of course continue to be required in considerable numbers, but if care is taken that the words adopted do not violate the basic rules of Pidgin structure, their presence would not be harmful to the nature and function of the language, especially if the mass media could be instrumental in explaining the meaning of new terms to the public.

Another important facet of New Guinea Pidgin which calls for standardization and language planning is its grammatical structure. Until recently, its core grammar was comparatively stable and the differences in the grammatical structure of various forms of Pidgin, relatively minor. However, the urban sociolect of New Guinea Pidgin has recently become increasingly unstable and fluid in recent years. In general, Urban Pidgin is losing some grammatical features which were common in some of its varieties until not long ago and which added to its expressive power. The ascertaining of the nature and range of functions of such more elaborate forms in past and present forms of Pidgin and their inclusion in the grammar of an enriched standardized form of Pidgin is another important task. This last observation contradicts earlier observations which have shown that the functional expansion of New Guinea Pidgin has positively influenced its structural growth. It seems that in spite of the functional expansion of the urban sociolect of New Guinea Pidgin, its overloading with structurally alien elements from English which are at variance with the underlying rules of Pidgin, has led to a weakening of these rules and the subsequent impoverishment of the structure of the language. It has been found that the loss of functional scope by Papua New Guinea vernaculars has led to their structural impoverishment and loss of their structural sophistication such as the disappearance of noun class systems and concord and of complex morphological features in the verbs. This factor may be a point to be kept in mind by advocators of English education for all Papua New Guineans: the small range of functions occupied by English and the continuously expanding functional range of New Guinea Pidgin, especially if it is strengthened through standardization and enrichment procedures as touched upon above, may well lead to an impoverishment of the English used by Papua New Guineans.

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Editor's note: Two recent articles of interest concerned with further details on this area are:

Wurm, Stephen "Pidgins, Creoles, Lingue Franche, and National Development," in *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics* ed. by Albert Valdman. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press.

Wurm, S.A., P. Mühlhäusler and D.C. Laycock. 1977. "Language Planning and Engineering in Papua New Guinea," *Pacific Linguistics*, Series C — no. 40, New Guinea Area Languages and Language Study, vol. 3, Language, Culture, Society, and the Modern World, fascicle 2.